Digital Workload, Well-Being, and Professional Identity of University Academics: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Despite digital technology having improved accessibility and flexibility, scholars highlighted that it has intensified workload pressure and changed professional experiences, particularly for university academics. This paper aims to review how university academics' professional identities and well-being are affected by their digital workload. The study used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to determine the connection between university academics' digital workload and their professional identities and well-being. The initial search gave 1258 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 1068 records were excluded. 190 full-text articles were screened, resulting in an exclusion of 150 studies that did not use Job Demands-Resources (JD-R). Finally, 40 studies met all inclusion criteria. Results revealed a negative relationship between digital workload and well-being, and some of them view digital workload as a source of stress. The connection between well-being and professional identity has been found to differ, and some authors believe that professional identity is a stable construct that is impacted by digitalisation indirectly through well-being outcomes. Thus, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating existing research findings on the interconnected impact of digital workload on the well-being and professional identity of university academics. The findings provide an inclusive framework for understanding the consequences of digital transformation in higher education and suggest that more mixed-method research is required on digital transformation to improve the well-being and professional identity of university academics.

Keywords: Academic Well-being, Digital Workload, Higher Education Institutes, Professional Identity, University Academics.

INTRODUCTION

As noted, the digital workload was created through the digital revolution in work settings. As defined by Scholze and Hecker (2023), "digitalized workload is the technical process of converting analogy [A1.1]signals into a digital form" (p.1). In other words, digitalized workload is the intensity, volume, and complexity of technology-incorporated tasks that employees perform (Buda & Kovács, 2024). Volume is the amount of work given to an employee within a fixed timeframe (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Complexity is defined as the cognitive demands required to perform intellectually demanding tasks (Lepine et al., 2005). Intensity is the effort required to fulfil the tasks within the set timeframe (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Thus, digital workload differs from traditional workload in its digitalized nature, which blurs work boundaries.

Applying the phenomenon to university academics, it has now become a significant prevailing issue in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The shift has altered the workload as it is now emotionally and cognitively challenging (Wang & Yao, 2025). Thus, given the considerations presented by scholars, it is necessary to evaluate an academic's digital workload to understand experiences and outcomes. The well-being of academics directly affects how they present themselves in the multiple roles they play. Beijaard et al. (2004) interpret professional identity as a sense of purpose developed by a professional within their role in an organization. Findings suggest that when academics consider digital workload as an interference, it can result in weakened professional identity, diminished job satisfaction, and role tension (Wang & Yao, 2025).

Despite the existing body of knowledge, research integrating professional identity, digital workload, and well-being is rare (Wang & Yao, 2025; Wang & Li, 2019). Further, JD-R could be used to show that digital workload is not only a job demand but also influences professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). The dearth of evidence-based investigations shows a significant gap in literature. Little is known about how an academic's digital workload affects their professional identity and well-being (Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022; Wang & Li, 2019). According to other studies, a digital workload lowers academic well-being and causes stress (Kinman & Johnson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2023).

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According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), JD-R offers a theoretical viewpoint that highlights two crucial concepts: demands and resources. According to the JD-R theory, if demands associated with digital workloads are not accompanied by sufficient resources, they may result in stress and burnout. HEIs may have something to do with this. For example, excessive digital workloads can result in burnout. JD-R theory is supported by this theory. However, there is a gap in the application of JD-R theory in digital workloads in HEIs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis, 2021). Another untested theory is that HEI employees' professional identities may be impacted by digital workloads (Beijaard et al., 2004). Many studies focused on engagement or stress that builds with digital workload and turn a blind eye to its effect on professional identity (Wang & Yao, 2025). A better insight could be provided by studying both aspects. Accordingly, the study aims to systematically review digital workload and its effects on the academic well-being and professional identity of university academics in HEIs.

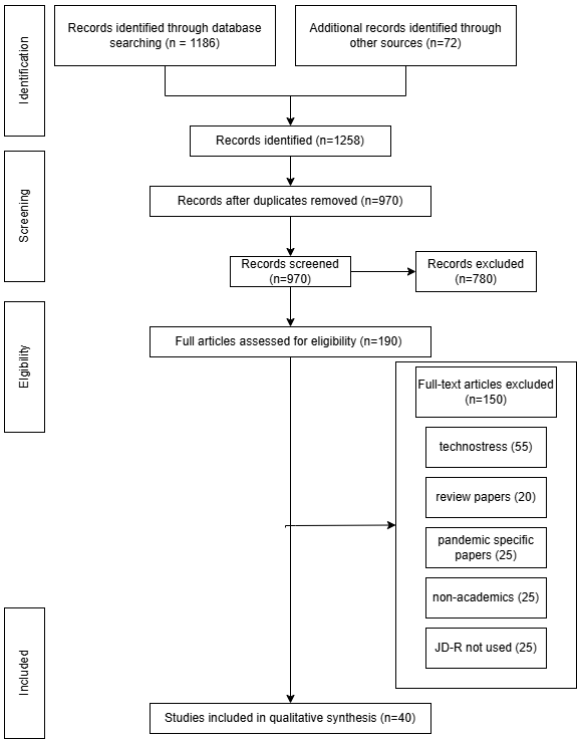
REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The study, a systematic literature review, adopted the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome (PICO) framework (What Is PICO in Research? The Framework Explained, 2026) to define the inclusion criteria and search scope. The population (P) is non-state university academics in HEIs of Sri Lanka. Intervention (I) focuses on the dimensions of digital workload. The comparison (C) includes the types of workloads. Outcomes (O) include the mediator, academic well-being, and the dependent variable, professional identity. The key terms of the study were identified, including population keywords such as “academic staff”, “faculty”, “university staff”, intervention keywords like “workload”, “online workload”, “digital work”, “technology-mediated workload”, and outcome keywords such as “academic identity”, “academic well-being”, “professional identity”, etc. The PRISMA 2020 methodology (Page et al., 2021) was used for the selection of studies to investigate the digital workload, professional identity, and academic well-being. Figure 2 presents the PRISMA flow of records through the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. The PRISMA approach was selected to ensure transparency in identifying, screening, and selecting empirical studies for systematic analysis. The review is based on research that was published between 2015 and 2025, a decade of transformation (Jandrić et al., 2018). In keeping with the study’s goal, which is "to investigate digital workload and its impact on academics’ well-being and professional identity," the review starts with a description of the study questions and objectives. A systematic review was conducted using Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald, and Elsevier. The selection of databases for the systematic review was guided by the interdisciplinary nature of the study. Since the study analyses the relationships between professional identity, academic well-being, and digital workload, it was necessary to include databases that cover literature in areas of social science, education, and management. Google Scholar (Google Scholar, n.d.) was selected since it provides greater coverage of a wide range of publications, including those that may not yet have been indexed on traditional databases. Scopus (Scopus, n.d.) provides indexing of high-quality peer-reviewed journals in education, management, social sciences, and information technology. Web of Science (Web of Science, n.d.) allows highly cited literature in digital transformation, academic work, and academic well-being. Emerald Publishing (Emerald Publishing, n.d.) was utilized since it contained literature in human resource management, higher education, and organizational behaviour, and finally, Elsevier (Elsevier, n.d.) databases were selected since they contain work in education, psychology, and social science research.

The eligibility criterion was established through inclusion and exclusion criteria. Empirical studies, those that focused on academics in HEIs, professional identity, digitalized workload, and well-being, were selected. To ensure credibility, quantitative studies were evaluated based on the sampling, measurement instruments, and data analysis mechanisms. The qualitative studies were assessed according to credibility, trustworthiness, and reflexivity. For mixed-method studies, both were examined. The initial search gave 1258 records. The review included English-language work due to the researcher’s language proficiency and the accessibility of papers. English was selected since it is the dominant language in academic publishing (Swales, 1985). Peer-reviewed journal articles were mainly considered; however, selected conference papers were also used since they provided relevant insight into contemporary higher education. 288 duplicates were removed, leaving 970 records. After screening titles and abstracts, 780 records were removed since they were non-empirical, not relevant, or focused on a different population, like non-academics or students. 190 full-text articles were screened, resulting in an exclusion of 150 studies that had technostress, review papers, non-academics, pandemic-specific studies, or those that did not use JD-R. Finally, 40 studies (presented in Figure 1) met all inclusion criteria. A narrative synthesis approach integrated the findings from the studies included. Although quantitative studies were found, variations existed across the designs, measurement instruments, and outcome variables, due to which statistical meta-analysis was considered unsuitable. Narrative synthesis was used since the literature showed a greater diversity of methods, covering qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research designs. The studies were organized based on characteristics like the region, research design, and population. The papers were then grouped into themes, including Digitalization and Well-being, Job Demands, Resources, and the JD-R Model, Professional Identity with Digitalization, and Constant Connectivity and Work-Life Balance. Of the 40 studies reviewed, 13 focused on developing regions, with a few focusing on developing nations. The rest focused on developed regions. From a population perspective, most studies focused on academic staff at a broader level. Contextually, most studies have been conducted within the US and Europe (Buda & Kovács, 2024; Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022; Civil et al., 2025; Douglas et al., 2025; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Gorrell, 2023; Heiden et al., 2021; Karatuna et al., 2022; Mitev et al., 2024; Niewiadomski et al., 2025; Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Non-state HEIs in the Global South are under-researched (Halal Orfali et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2023; Sun & Yoon, 2025; Trillo et al., 2025). Qualitative studies have also highlighted and suggested how digitalization reshapes the professional identity of academics (Ruiner et al., 2023; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Studies have utilized non-probability sampling methods (Enakrire et al., 2025; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024). Methodologically, most studies rely on cross-sectional questionnaire data collection designs (Adha Hafit et al., 2025; Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; du Plessis, 2020; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Heiden et al., 2021; Mitev et al., 2024; Mosleh et al., 2022; Shange & Nyide, 2025; Sun & Yoon, 2025; Vizcarra et

al., 2024), yet only a handful of the others combine a qualitative analysis to get a better deeper understanding (Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022; Enakrire et al., 2025). Across the reviewed studies, digital workload was an independent variable, and academic well-being was the most common outcome variable. Professional identity was less frequently directly available and was studied indirectly across the literature. Overall, the review highlights a fragmented body of research.

Figure 1: PRISMA Framework for the Study



Source: Developed by Researchers, 2026

REVIEW RESULTS AND THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

The study critically reviews and discusses the related theories that provide a base for digital workload, well-being, and professional identity, together with definitions and dimensions of each variable. Then, the study assesses empirical and contextual literature relating to the variables and finally reviews and confers the methodology applied by related literature. The following section exhibits review results.

Theoretical Integration

This section reviews the theoretical base for the conceptualization of the digital workload, professional identity, and well-being. It defines the variables, explains how they are linked, and discusses their treatment in the existing literature.

Digital Workload: The concept of workload is fundamental to organizational and occupational research. Scholars define workload in multiple ways. Workload "encompasses the quantity and intricacy of work that a single worker takes on over a particular duration of time" (Adha Hafit et al., 2025, p. 2). With the digital revolution, the concept of digitalization emerged. As defined by Scholze and Hecker (2023), "digitalized workload is the technical process of converting analog signals into a digital form" (p.1). The definitions advanced by scholars came from different perspectives, despite having common attributes. The cognitive demand is implicit in several definitions and includes intensity or volume as a core element. In literature, workload is the growing demands given to individuals. The term digital adds meaning, referring to technology-driven tasks or demands placed in an individual's hands. Holistically describing, the term digital workload highlights cognitive load and intensity as core elements. However, there are differences. Scholze and Hecker (2023) focus on the technical process. A few others bring in a human touch to the definition and bring meaning to the term digital workload (Buda & Kovács, 2024; Wang & Yao, 2025). Unlike other definitions on the list, the definition by Gnugesser et al. (2025) directly links the definition to the JD-R model. It brings digital into the term and seems a reasonable definition for the study conducted. Adha Hafit et al. (2025) and Zacher and Rudolph (2024) convey similar meanings.

The JD-R model defines work as a balance between job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). From the perspective of a digitalised workload, job demands could be linked to digital work, and job resources could be linked to the assistance given to the employee's digital work. The Workload Theory / NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) brings in the core idea that workload is the physical, emotional, and mental effort that is required to perform tasks (Hart & Staveland, 1988). The theory provides clear measurement tools and dimensions, including effort, frustration, and physical demand, alongside the dimensions mentioned above. Similarly, Cognitive Load Theory describes the mental effort that arises from carrying out complex tasks but does not consider emotional or time demands (Sweller, 1988). Siegrist (1996) highlights the stress that arises when the effort does not match the reward given. The Multitasking/ Task Switching Concept (Monsell, 2003) addresses the cognitive costs of switching between tasks.

Although several established theories and concepts discuss workload and stress, they each only explain aspects of digital workload. Among the reviewed, the JD-R model gives the most comprehensive framework to understand workload (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). While the model was originally introduced for the general work environment, scholars emphasize that with digitalization, new categories of job demands have arisen, which put additional strain on an employee, and this could not be captured by traditional workload definitions or models (Belanger et al., 2001; Mazmanian et al., 2013). Although the model has been validated across occupations, it has historically not been applied to digital workload across HEIs (Molino et al., 2020). Recent scholars have emphasized that HEIs have transformed due to digitization (Bond et al., 2021). Therefore, the model could be aligned with HEIs, and the adaptation of this model to HEIs and digital workload forms the theoretical gap for the current study. Complexity, volume, and intensity can be considered the dimensions of digital workload. Volume is the amount of work assigned within a given timeframe (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Complexity is the cognitive demands required to perform intellectually demanding tasks (Lepine et al., 2005). Intensity is the effort required to fulfil tasks within a timeframe (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Volume is the amount and frequency of online activities that are required to be completed within a given time (Bakker &

Demerouti, 2007). HEI research shows that digitalization has expanded volume by integrating technology into multiple aspects (Hans Schuetze et al., 2024). From the JD-R point of view, a high volume of tasks presents a job demand that takes up time and energy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The second dimension of digital workload is complexity. It is the effort required to perform digital work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Sweller, 1988; Tarafdar et al., 2015). In HEIs, the complexity of integrating digital tools into teaching, administration, and research could be categorized as complexity. The final dimension is intensity. Intensity is the speed, time pressure, and urgency required to fulfil work-related tasks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hart & Staveland, 1988). Digital technologies have intensified this, with research demonstrating that online tools have increased this pressure and have reduced recovery time for knowledge workers (Mazmanian et al., 2013).

Collectively, intensity, volume, and complexity would clarify the digital workload in HEIs. Using these dimensions, the study aims to capture how digital technologies reshape academia. A digital workload is characterized as requiring substantial cognitive/applicable input when completing work digitally and requires a significant amount of time when performing technologically enabled task(s) or completing these task(s) with a high level of cognitive difficulty.

Academic Well-being: Despite the common traits in definitions for well-being, they vary in scope. Bautista et al. (2023) states that there are multiple parts within the term well-being, but do not state what they are. The definition is too general but could be applied to the current study domain since it does not mention a specific domain. Danna & Griffin (1999) define well-being as "comprising the various life/non-work satisfactions enjoyed by individuals (i.e., satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with social life, family life, recreation, spirituality, and so forth), work/job-related satisfactions (i.e., satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with pay, promotion opportunities, the job itself, co-workers, and so forth), and general health" (p. 359). The authors give a comprehensive definition, defining the emotional and work/job aspects. However, this definition is too broad to be applied to digital workload alone, which is the basis of the current study. Occupational well-being defined by Aryanti et al. (2020), highlights the emotional aspect at work. However, it does not address work pressures.

Theoretical models explain occupational well-being. Three models were compared for this study: the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), Job Demand-Control (JDC) model (Karasek, 1979), and Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist, 1996) to describe the relationship between demand, control, and support. The JD-R model describes the relationship between differing levels of demand and well-being, as well as what resources contribute to employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), while the Demand-Control model describes the level of job-related control provided by an employer (Karasek, 1979). The model states that high demands combined with low decision latitude lead to psychological strain. The ERI model discusses the mismatch between the efforts of employees and what they receive in return (Siegrist, 2017). While the models share common traits, they differ in variables examined and depth of explanation. The Demand-Control model does not capture emotional and cognitive aspects, which are an important part of well-being (Karasek, 1979). The ERI model discusses unfairness and dissatisfaction in jobs, and not how the workload affects the well-being of an employee (Siegrist, 2017). In contrast, the JD-R model incorporates demands and resources and thus could be adjusted and mapped into the current context more flexibly than the others (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Therefore, JD-R is better suited to explain the effect of digital workload on academic well-being.

Academic well-being is how academics think, feel, and act within their roles and within the work environment, reflected through their psychological, emotional, and professional well-being. A seminal work emphasizes workplace psychological well-being (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012). Applied to academia, psychological well-being could reflect an academic's competence in managing tasks and organizing their work. The increasing digital workload could influence this. A second dimension of academic well-being is the aspect of emotional well-being. From an organizational perspective, it is how individuals experience their job roles emotionally (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Research shows that emotional well-being influences the overall quality of the environment (Chang, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The third and final dimension is professional well-being. Across professions, professional well-being has been identified as a key predictor of various aspects, including organizational commitment, employee engagement, and career sustainability (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011). From an academic perspective, managing their digital workload could become tedious, thus leading to negative job satisfaction and engagement.

Building on the context of the current study, academic well-being can be defined as the work-related emotional and cognitive state of academics, shaped by the functions within academic roles, alongside the management of digital workload and available resources.

Professional Identity: Professional identity captures how a person defines themselves within a professional role. Professional identity shows a dynamic balance between a person's image and the professional roles they perform (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Durakovic and Aznavoorian (2024) define professional identity as a "multidimensional phenomenon with subjective and objective experiences" (p. 188). Definitions state that professional identity is shaped by personal identity (Ibarra, 1999) and external factors, including the roles played and interactions within a work environment (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998; Winter, 2009). Another common factor identified is that professional identity involves a balance of multiple factors (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998; Winter, 2009). Overall, the definitions state that professional identity is constructed through an interconnection of individual and organizational factors.

However, each scholar provides a different scope of definition. Volkmann and Anderson (1998) show how academics balance multiple roles. It highlights the term equilibrium, which is an important aspect as an academic. The definition provided by Winter (2009) shows that professional identity is a mix of personal and professional selves. It is somewhat like the definition provided by (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998) since it brings out a social aspect, but it purely highlights professional identity from an academic perspective. Durakovic and Aznavoorian (2024) state that professional identity is a

fusion of subjective (self-constructs within the job) and objective (role norms) aspects. Considering the definitions above and the current study context, it is possible to define professional identity as the sense of self that an academic develops in terms of their professional roles, which include the understanding of their obligations, the adherence to professional values, the confidence demonstrated when performing digital-related tasks, and a sense of belonging.

Two related theories were identified. The Social Identity Theory explains how groups and belonging influence professional identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, the model has a limited focus on individual role conflicts. The Role Identity Theory, on the other hand, identifies role clarity and conflict with digital workload (Burke & Stets, 2009). It emphasizes how individuals maintain their professional identity through the dimensions. However, the model might not be useful to study the organizational influence.

Several dimensions can be identified within professional identity. The first is role perception. Van der Meer (2024) defines role perceptions as "cognitive beliefs rather than affective reactions such as job satisfaction and affective commitment" (p. 1612). From an academic perspective, effective role perception would help academics manage professional responsibilities while adapting to demands such as the digital workload, thereby making role perception an important dimension of professional identity. The second dimension is professional values. Values are "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973,p. 5). With the increase of digital workload, professional values could be challenged or reshaped. Thus, professional values stand as a critical dimension for understanding professional identity. Professional confidence is the third dimension. It is the dynamic personal belief (Holland et al., 2012). From an academic's perspective, when work becomes digitalized, their confidence in getting the job done may be strengthened by skill development or weakened by the increasing workload. Therefore, professional confidence is used to explain how an academic would face digital workload pressures. The sense of belonging is the final dimension and is defined as the need for frequent interactions within ongoing relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Hagerty et al. (1992) define sense of belonging as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of the system of environment" (p. 173). Within academia, as the use of digital platforms increases, the methods of communication and interaction alter, making sense of belonging an important aspect to be considered.

Theoretical literature provides a foundation to understand the effect of digital workload on professional identity and academic well-being. JD-R emerged as the most suitable model for the current study since it discusses how demands affect the well-being of an individual and, in turn, their attitudes towards work-related tasks. The current study extends the JD-R model by integrating professional identity as the outcome variable and mediated by academic well-being. This is expected to provide an understanding of how digital workload affects academics in contemporary HEIs.

Empirical Insights

This section synthesizes empirical studies on HEIs and digitalization. The synthesis discusses the key empirical findings, frameworks, and methodologies of existing studies.

Digitalization and Well-being: Research spanning different geographies shows that digital workload is a universal phenomenon rather than limited to a certain region or country (Enakrire et al., 2025; Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Initially, researchers learned how digital technologies can produce empowering impacts on people. Now, however, more than a decade later, researchers are concentrating on ways in which excessive use of digital workloads can hinder the well-being of an academic (Sharma et al., 2023). Increased digitalization has occurred over time, especially during the period following COVID-19 (Sharma et al., 2023). The movement towards using a great deal of digital technology has contributed to creating high levels of potential for stress amongst academics (Mosleh et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). Not only has digitalization resulted in significant amounts of ambiguity regarding the work-life balance of an academic (Mitev et al., 2024; Mosleh et al., 2022; Niewiadomski et al., 2025). The academic research literature is filled with multiple studies documenting the positive consequences of using digital technology, which exist through the provision of substantial levels of support for academics through digital competencies and through regulating digital workloads (Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Kelder et al., 2025; Ruiner et al., 2023). Without these forms of support, academics will experience emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being because of the actions associated with digitalization (Sun & Yoon, 2025).

Job Demands, Resources, and the JD-R Model: The studies that applied the JD-R model have provided empirical evidence that academic well-being is affected by the relationship between demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Heiden et al., 2021; Trillo et al., 2025). The research conducted on different continents has also supported the association between high demands causing stress resulting in decreased job satisfaction (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; du Plessis, 2020; Janib et al., 2021; Vizcarra et al., 2024). When an employee lacks resources and has to fulfil excessively high demands or workloads, they soon become emotionally exhausted (Pakdee et al., 2025) . Several qualitative studies have found that digital ways of working increase the employee's workload and disrupt boundaries, as employees are frequently expected to be available at all times (Douglas et al., 2025; Karatuna et al., 2022; Shange & Nyide, 2025), and more recent studies have supported this finding (Aldhilan et al., 2025). Using the JD-R Model, research has demonstrated that digital technologies can be considered as resources when there is institutional support. When academics have access to infrastructure, training, and support, then digital technologies can enhance their effectiveness and flexibility (Karatuna et al., 2022). However, in many academic institutions, digitalization is being implemented without adequate infrastructure or support, converting digital technologies into demands as opposed to resources (Douglas et al., 2025).

Professional Identity with Digitalization: Constant Connectivity and Work-Life Balance: Research undertaken in the context of digital environments has found that a factor that

blurs the boundaries of work and life is constant connectivity (Farivar et al., 2024; Rosero-Ordóñez, 2025). Researchers have found that digitalization (Rosero-Ordóñez, 2025) and the normalization of being on "standby" (Arantes & Vicars, 2024) have diminished academic well-being and blurred the boundaries of work and life. However, connectivity has been viewed as a collaborative opportunity, as well as a hindrance to work-life balance (Farivar et al., 2024).

Contextual Insights

Digital technologies form a key component of the work of academics. Global research evidence indicates that digital workloads are a global phenomenon experienced by academics and are not limited to one country or geographic region (Enakrire et al., 2025). Many academic researchers have evaluated the concept of digital workload during and after the pandemic. Academics from various nation-states have reported an increase in their role expectations and workload (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Studies indicate that having clear institutional structures to support, develop, and train staff with respect to the use of digital technologies can help reduce any negative association with digital workloads (Douglas et al., 2025; Enakrire et al., 2025; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Gorrell, 2023; Kelder et al., 2025).

Researchers have also discussed how digitalization influences a person's academic identity as well as the nature of their work. The digitalization of work has blurred some of the boundaries between a person's work and personal lives (Adha Hafit et al., 2025b; Buda & Kovács, 2024; Mosleh et al., 2022b; Niewiadomski et al., 2025; Rosero-Ordóñez, 2025; Shange & Nyide, 2025). As a result, researchers have reported that academic workers experience an increase in their family/work conflicts, particularly those who are starting their careers, for those who are parents, and women; as such, digitalization has had an increasing effect of creating and/or exacerbating inequalities (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Mosleh et al., 2022).

Methodological Patterns

Several theoretical models attempt to explain how variables interact with one another. The JD-R is consistently the most frequently cited (Adha Hafit et al., 2025b; Civil et al., 2025; Karatuna et al., 2022b; Ruiner et al., 2023; Scholze & Hecker, 2023; Shange & Nyide, 2025). For example, Leavitt's Diamond Model, Bridges' Transition Theory (Mitev et al., 2024), and the Task-Fit Theory (Sun & Yoon, 2025) are some of the most noted models.

The dominant type of study design utilized in the articles was cross-sectional surveys utilizing quantitative methods, whereas the researchers referenced (Aldhilan et al., 2025; Douglas et al., 2025; El-Soussi, 2022; Farivar et al., 2024; Halal Orfali et al., 2024; Karatuna et al., 2022; Kimwere & Mwanzia, 2025; Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis, 2021) also employed qualitative techniques to conduct their research. Researchers also used scales and/or rating systems to collect information (Adha Hafit et al., 2025b; Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; du Plessis, 2020; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Heiden et al., 2021; Mitev et al., 2024; Mosleh et al., 2022; Shange & Nyide, 2025; Sun & Yoon, 2025; Vizcarra et al., 2024) . Mixed methods were utilized by a small number of studies (Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022a; Enakrire et al., 2025) and represented an underutilized approach. Finally, non-probability sampling was noted as being another underrepresented aspect of these studies (Enakrire et al., 2025; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024). Although these techniques allow for faster gathering of data, there are response and representational type biases that come into play as well. The majority of the studies that were analyzed utilized a cross-sectional method (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; du Plessis, 2020; Fernández-Arias et al., 2024; Heiden et al., 2021; Janib et al., 2021; Mitev et al., 2024; Mosleh et al., 2022b; Pakdee et al., 2025; Ruiner et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). This method restricts any evaluation that might occur over a longer time frame for the potential of long-term adaptations. The JD-R was also the most frequently used method in this group of studies. Most were performed within one institution, region, or country. All of these studies have been beneficially informative; however, there exist certain limitations regarding their geographic distribution, causation, and responses within these studies.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The systematic review synthesized existing research on digitalization in HEIs with attention to digital workload, professional identity, and academic well-being of university academics. The study critically reviewed and discussed the related theories that provide a base for digital workload, well-being, and professional identity, assessed the empirical and contextual literature relating to the variables, and finally reviewed the methodology applied by related literature. Review results showed a negative relationship between academic well-being and digital workload in most studies. Some of them conceptualize digital workload as a stress creator. Some other authors state that the effects of digital workload are context-dependent rather than negative in general. There were differences identified in the relationship between professional identity and academic well-being. Some authors treat professional identity as a stable construct that is indirectly influenced by digitalization through the outcomes of well-being. Others argue that professional identity is directly reshaped by role expectations of digital workload. This shows a contrast between the views, raising doubts as to whether digital workload directly influences professional identity or if well-being mediates this relationship.

The review helped identify the knowledge gaps that need to be filled within the domain of university academics in HEIs. Conceptually, the review showed that the JD-R model gives a strong foundation to explain the nature of digital workload and academic well-being, while professional identity can be explained based on social identity theory. Previous scholars have rarely integrated the JD-R model and social identity theory to study how digital workload affects professional identity and well-being. Review results further revealed that the relationships among well-being, digital workload, and professional identity have not been studied empirically. Meanwhile, most studies have been conducted in Western contexts, and Global South HEIs are under-researched. However, studies in South Asia and university academics have not been adequately studied.

The reviewed literature shows important implications for institutions. Digitalization in HEIs has prioritized performance metrics and has often overlooked its impact on the professional identity and well-being of university academics. Review results show a need for university academics to recognize digital workload as a demand and implement policies to

guide the use and boundaries. Accordingly, systematic studies are required to investigate the effects of digital workload on professional identity, with this relationship mediated by the well-being of academics in HEIs, with the theoretical basis of the JD-R framework, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka.

The review, however, had its limitations. The review was limited to English-based sources, which could have excluded research conducted in Sinhala and Tamil, and could be a major limitation, especially because the study aims to capture data from Sri Lankan non-state HEIs. The reviewed papers showed variations in research designs and methodological approaches, thus limiting the feasibility of conducting a statistical meta-analysis. Therefore, a narrative synthesis approach was used. It was also based only on secondary data. Also, the findings of the review were dependent on the scope of the study. The review also focused only on empirical literature, which could have knowingly or unknowingly excluded any hidden or grey areas identified in systematic reviews done by scholars. Future studies could adopt sequential mixed-method research designs and theoretically grounded approaches to understand the stress levels and burnout caused by digital workload in HEIs. Studies could also investigate the effects of the dimensions on different faculties and academic levels in universities. This could give a clearer picture and understanding of how digital workload impacts different stages and fields in HEIs.

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